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THE RELIGION OF THE POST-EXILIC PROPHETS

Dr. Bennett's volume on the post-exilic prophets¹ is the first to appear of a projected series of ten on the literature and religion of Israel under the editorship of Dr. James Hastings of *Bible Dictionary* fame. As may easily be surmised another volume will be forthcoming on the pre-exilic prophets. So far as the titles go, and they often do not go very far, we notice a big gap, viz., the exilic prophets. But from the author's preface it appears that the hiatus is in the titles only; for the volume before us covers Ezekiel and II Isaiah, while Jeremiah is to be included in Professor Kennett's book. As the whole of Ezekiel and a large part of II Isaiah are exilic, one wonders why the title was not made more accurate by saying, "Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophets," especially as the former are the larger in volume and more important in substance.

One other point about titles. It seems strange that, with an accomplished editor and author, we should find, in the title of the series "Literature and Religion," as the title of this volume the "Religion of the Post-Exilic Prophets," while the author's preface opens thus: "The subject of this volume is the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament of the Exile (*sic*) and the period after the Exile." As a matter of fact the author's work follows the title of the series, covering both the literary and the religious.

The character of a book is more important than its name, and we turn to that. The author has not confused the two branches of his subject, but has dealt with them separately, formally dividing the work into two parts, the first covering the literary treatment and the second the doctrinal. The spatial assignment is justly made, 133 pages for Part I, 243 pages for Part II. In a work like this the religious teaching of the prophet is far more important than his date.

A glance at the critical position shows how completely wrong are the once oft-heard predictions of a coming reaction in Old Testament criticism. This book is conservative in the best sense of the term; but Obadiah is placed after Haggai and Zechariah, and Jonah, Zech., chaps. 9-14, Jonah, and the Isaianic apocalypse, chaps. 24-27, are put in the Greek period. In the critical work Professor Bennett shows that he has but one norm, and that is whatever is best supported by the evidence. Critical discussion, however, occupies but a small space in this treatise. A date is assigned to each prophet, often not very positively. Indeed it is impossible to be over sure

¹ *The Religion of the Post-Exilic Prophets*. By W. H. Bennett, Litt.D., D.D. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: Scribners, 1908. xii + 396 pages. \$2.

in some cases, and a brief statement of the reason is given. The student whose primary interest is the date must consult the many other works in which that subject has a more conspicuous place.

We find an attempt in this part to state the contents of the various prophecies. In dealing with Ezekiel there is a little else given than the contents of the chapters. That task is a very hard one. Many have tried to put in brief modern phrase the substance of prophetic utterances, and surely the last word has not yet been said. The fact is that the Hebrew prophets do not lend themselves to condensation, but only to expansion. At their best these utterances, like all great speeches, are already abbreviated to the utmost. He who essays to render them more intelligible for a modern reader will find the only successful road that of free amplification.

In the doctrinal treatment the work is marred at least in form by following too closely the scheme of modern dogmatics. "Atonement and Reprobation," "The Individual after Death" are not subjects under which the teaching of the Old Testament prophets naturally falls. They make but a poor basis for theological doctrines of the modern type. They were chiefly concerned with the character and fortunes of the nation, while Christian dogmatics seem almost to ignore the fact that there is a kingdom of God.

In spite of these and numerous other defects—like the oft printing of a Hebrew word in a footnote when a transliteration has been given in the text, a note useless to the general reader and needless for the scholar—this book will be a useful addition to the library of the student of the prophets after the fall of Jerusalem. Dr. Bennett is clear in his thinking and so in his writing. He is sympathetic with his subject. He does not, for example, dismiss anthropomorphism as a crude product of an unenlightened people, but says that "it means that man discerns a personality behind or immanent in the universe, endowed with some or all of those qualities which he himself possesses" (p. 140). His treatment of the Hebrew religious terminology is often very good, giving a distinct lexicographical value to the book. It is especially gratifying that he has pointed out the hopeless confusion to the English reader of the everlasting rendering of *nephesh* by "soul," whereas with a pronominal suffix it is generally but an emphatic pronoun, like "myself." Furthermore, despite the faulty divisions of subject, most of the great ideas of the prophets do find exposition somewhere in the volume.

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